

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9142
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINS, BC, RH
SUBJECT: ESCALATION OF INCIDENTS AND TENSION ALONG RHODESIAN BORDER

REF: A. GABORONE 2306 B. GABORONE 2183 C. GABORONE 2145
D. GABORONE 2238

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

SUMMARY: SMITH GOVERNMENT HAS DESIGNATED ENTIRE BOTSWANA-
RHODESIA BORDER "OPERATIONAL AREA". PRESS REPORTS CONTINUE OF
KIDNAPPINGS AND INCURSIONS INTO BOTSWANA FROM RHODESIA. BOTSWANA
POLICE ROADBLOCKS ARE GENERALLY ACCEPTED BUT HAVE CAUSED PROBLEMS
IN FRANCISTOWN. END SUMMARY.

1. DECEMBER 15 BOTSWANA DAILY NEWS ARTICLE, HEADLINED "WAR
ZONE IS EXTENDED TO BOTSWANA'S BORDER", ANNOUNCES DESIGNATION BY
RHODESIAN SECURITY FORCES OF "OPERATIONAL AREAS ALONG ENTIRE
RHODESIA-BOTSWANA BORDER. BASED IN PART ON REUTERS REPORTS
FROM SALISBURY, PRESS STATES THAT ESTABLISHMENT OF "OPERATION
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TANGENT" ABOUT SIX WEEKS AGO MEANS THAT RHODESIAN SECURITY
FORCES WILL BE "HIGHLY ACTIVE" ALONG BORDER. SIMILAR FRONT-
PAGE ARTICLE IN DECEMBER 12 BULWAAYO SUNDAY NEWS THAT
ALMOST ENTIRE AREA OF MATABELELAND FROM KAZUNGULA TO BEITBRIDGE
INCLUDED IN OPERATIONAL AREA. RHODESIAN ARMY OFFICER INVOLVED
IN "OPERATION TANGENT" CITED IN ARTICLE AS SAYING THAT MOST OF

HIS MEN HAVE PREVIOUSLY PARTICIPATED IN OPERATION HURRICAN IN THE NORTHEAST OF RHODESIA.

2. MEANWHILE, GOB OFFICIALS AND LOCAL PRESS POINT TO REPEATED INCURSIONS INTO AND PROVOCATIONS AGAINST BOTSWANA FROM RHODESIA. ON DECEMBER 11 DAILY NEWS AND RADIO BOTSWANA ANNOUNCED KIDNAPPING OF THREE MORE BOTSWANA FROM BORDER AREA BY AN UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF BLACK RHODESIAN SOLDIERS (REF A). DECEMBER 14 DAILY NEWS REPORTS THESE KIDNAPPINGS AND CATALOGUES OTHER RECENT PROVOCATIONS INCLUDING KIDNAPPING OF 16-YEAR-OLD BOY (REF B) AND FRANCISTOWN BOMBING (REF C).

3. DAILY NEWS DECEMBER 16 ALSO FEATURES FRONT-PAGE REPORT OF NIGHT VISITS BY RHODESIAN SECURITY FORCES TO HOMES OF TWO BOTSWANA FAMILIES DECEMBER 14. ONE HOME ATTACKED WAS THAT OF FATHER OF 16-YEAR OLD BOY ABDUCTED EARLIER. ACCORDING TO ARTICLE, HE SCARED OFF THE SOLDIERS BY FIRING SHOTS AT THEM. IN SECOND INCIDENT, A FAMILY HEARD VEHICLE APPROACHING AND REPORTEDLY HID IN NEARBY ROCKS. WHEN RHODESIAN SOLDIERS, WHO NUMBERED "AT LEAST FIVE", FOUND NO ONE HOME, THEY BURNED HUTS AND STORE-ROOM. END UNCLASSIFIED.

4. BEGIN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE: DURING COURTESY VISIT TO PARLIAMENT DECEMBER 15, ACTING EXTAFF MINISTER KWELAGOBE TOOK ME ASIDE TO INFORM ME OF INCIDENT DESCRIBED IN PARA 3 ABOVE. HE SAID WITNESSES CLEARLY SAW THAT ATTACKERS WERE RHODESIAN SOLDIERS. AS INCIDENTS TOOK PLACE AT NIGHT, WITNESSES COULD NOT TELL WHETHER SOLDIERS WERE BLACK OR WHITE. THERE IS NO DOUBT IN KWELAGOBE'S MIND THAT SMITH FORCES PERPETRATED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THESE ACTIONS. STUNG BY SUCH INCIDENTS (AND BY CRITICISM, SOME OF WHICH I PARLIAMENT DEBATE, FROM GOVERNMENT BACKBENCHERS AND OPPOSITION MP'S OVER ALLEGED GOB FAILURE TO PROTECT CITIZENS), GOB REACTING BY PLEDGING POLICE MOBILE UNIT (PMU) BUILDUP AND ESTABLISHING ROADBLOCKS AROUND FRANCISTOWN (REF D).

5. AN INDICATION OF LOCAL PUBLIC REACTION TO THESE INCIDENTS CAN BE SEEN IN INDEPENDENT APPRAISAL OF ROADBLOCKS AS NECESSARY "POSITIVE ACTION". ACCORDING TO PRIVATE AMERICAN WHO VISITED EMBASSY DECEMBER 15, HOWEVER, SITUATION IN FRANCISTOWN WAS "VERY BAD" DURING FIRST WEEK OF NIGHT ROADBLOCKS. HE SAID NO VISIBLE ROADBLOCKS HAD BEEN SET UP AT FIRST. RATHER ARMED PMU MEMBERS HID BESIDE ROAD AND JUMPED OUT WAVING WEAPONS AS VEHICLE APPROACHED. IN LIGHT OF GUERRILLA AND SMITH FORCE MOVEMENTS IN REGION, MANY DRIVERS WERE AFRAID TO STOP AT SIGNAL OF ARMED MEN ALONG ROAD. SEVERAL SHOOTING INCIDENTS RESULTED, INCLUDING NEWER TRADEGEY IN WHICH SMALL DAUGHTER OF WENELA AIR PILOT WOUNDED. APPARENTLY

PROBLEMS EXTENDED BEYOND WHITES. SEVERAL BOTSWANA WHO FAILED TO STOP ALSO WERE FIRED UPON. WHEN SOME FRANCISTOWN RESIDENTS COMPLAINED, POLICE ALLEGEDLY ADMITTED THEY HAD BEEN "SHOOTING TO KILL".

6. OUR AMERICAN VISITOR SAID THERE WAS ATTEMPTED "POLITICAL COVERUP" IN THE WENELA INCIDENT WITH LATTER WARNED TO KEEP QUIET ABOUT THE SHOOTING. POLICE TRIED TO IMPOUND THE CAR BUT WENELA REMOVED TIRES TO PREVENT THIS. CAR LATER MOVED TO WENELA HANGAR AT AIRPORT.

7. ALTHOUGH "PROPER" ROADBLOCKS WITH HIGHLY VISIBLE WHITE BARRELS NOW REPORTEDLY USED AT NIGHT, OUR AMERICAN SOURCE CONSIDERED SITUATION STILL "QUITE TENSE" IN FRANCISTOWN. ALTHOUGH HE PERSONALLY HAS NOT EXPERIENCED ANTI-WHITE BACKLASH PREDICTED BY SOME RHODESAIAN AND SOUTH AFRICAN NEWSPAPERS AFTER FRANCISTOWN BOMBING, HE SAID THAT SEVERAL EXPATRIATES WHO HAD PLANNED TO RENEW CONTRACTS HAVE NOW DECIDED NOT TO DO SO.
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NORLAND

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